



NEWS From:

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus

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TRI-CAUCUS DEMANDS THAT REPUBLICAN LEADERS REPUDIATE REP. COBLE'S VIEWS

WASHINGTON, DC — Today, the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, the Congressional Black Caucus, and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (collectively the "Tri-Caucus") sent a letter calling on House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-IL), and House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr. (R-WI) to repudiate the views expressed by Rep. Howard Coble's (R-NC) regarding the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

The Tri-Caucus further called on Speaker Hastert and Chairman Sensenbrenner to pass H. Res. 56, the "Day of Remembrance" Resolution authored by Rep. Mike Honda (D-CA), and thus assure all Americans that Congress knows that the internment of Americans without due process during World War II was wrong.

Following is the complete text of the letter:

Dear Mr. Speaker and Chairman Sensenbrenner:

We write regarding the very troubling and damaging comments made by our colleague, Congressman Howard Coble.

During a radio call-in show on February 4, 2003, Congressman Coble stated that the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II was not wrong because "they were an endangered species" and "it wasn't safe for them to be on the street." Congressman Coble also stated that he agreed with Franklin D. Roosevelt's establishment of the internment camps because "some (Japanese Americans) probably were intent on doing harm to us, just as some of these Arab Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us."

Congressman Coble was irresponsible, inflammatory and patently wrong. In 1988, President Reagan and Congress offered an apology and redress to the Japanese American community for its internment by enacting the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. The Act formally criticized President Roosevelt's decision to intern Japanese Americans and apologized for "fundamental violations of the basic civil liberties and constitutional rights of these individuals of

In 1980, Congress adopted legislation establishing the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Citizens to investigate the claim that the incarceration of Japanese Americans was justified by military necessity. After an extensive examination, the Commission found that President Roosevelt's Executive Order was not issued to either protect Japanese Americans or to protect U.S. interests. Rather, the Report states:

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“In sum, Executive Order 9066 was not justified by military necessity, and the decisions that followed from it-exclusion, detention, the ending of detention and the ending of exclusion-were not founded upon military considerations. The broad historical causes that shaped these decisions were race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership. Widespread ignorance about Americans of Japanese descent contributed to a policy conceived in haste and executed in an atmosphere of fear and anger at Japan. A grave personal injustice was done to the American citizens and resident aliens of Japanese ancestry who, without individual review or any probative evidence against them were excluded, removed and detained by the United States during World War II.” (Emphasis added).

Congressman Coble has been offered multiple opportunities to clarify and correct his comments, but instead, he has reiterated that his comments were based on “historical fact”. When we err about history and fail to learn from our mistakes, we risk repeating the past.

Congressman Coble's support for past wholesale incarceration of U.S. citizens without due process demonstrates an apparent disregard for civil liberties. As our country is engaged in a war against terrorism, and is on the brink of a war against Iraq, respect for civil liberties is crucial to ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

To demonstrate that you have learned from the Trent Lott experience and the importance of getting history right, we ask you to repudiate Congressman Coble's statements as an inaccurate, misleading and potentially damaging view of history.

Further, we ask that you take action to see that H. Res. 56, the Day of Remembrance Resolution, be taken up by the House Judiciary Committee and, if passed by that committee, taken up on the floor of the House of Representatives. It is of utmost importance to assure all Americans that Congress knows that the internment of Americans without due process during World War II was wrong, and that Congress understands the importance of upholding the Constitution and protecting civil liberties, in wartime as in peacetime.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus:

Rep. David Wu, Chair

Rep. Mike Honda, Vice Chair

Congressional Black Caucus:

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Chair

Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, First Vice Chair

Rep. Corrine Brown, Second Vice Chair

Congressional Hispanic Caucus:

Rep. Ciro D. Rodriguez, Chair

Rep. Grace Flores Napolitano, Vice Chair